

# socialist standard

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Journal of The Socialist Party of Great Britain - Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement

## Dawn of the Debt

### Capitalism and the origins of money



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## Introducing The Socialist Party

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The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity

to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our

ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

**If you would like more details about The Socialist Party, complete and return the form on page 23.**



# socialist standard

AUGUST 2012

## Editorial

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### The Spanish miners' struggle

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THE EUROZONE financial crisis has led to a resurgence of class struggle across much of the continent, with Greece and Spain in the forefront. The Spanish situation has particularly caught the headlines in recent weeks. On 11 July several hundred Spanish coalminers, who had walked 284 miles for three weeks from Asturias to Madrid, were joined by 25,000 supporters. Clashes with the riot police took place near the Ministry of Industry. Coalminers carried banners saying "Miner's Struggle = Worker's Struggle". Supporters threw firecrackers, stones, bottles, and cans at the police who were firing rubber bullets. Ten protesters were hit by rubber bullets, several arrests were made and there was a total of 76 injuries.

The working class in Spain is bearing the brunt of the austerity measures there – regulations that make it easier to sack workers, cuts to education and the national healthcare service, and 24 percent unemployment. The coalminers have had cuts in funding to learn new professions. The protests in Madrid happened on the same day that Prime Minister Rajoy announced a €65 billion austerity plan that will further assault the living standards of the working class as the country heads for a double-dip recession.

The main issue for the coalminers is the 63 percent cut in subsidies to coal mining industry that will destroy the industry. Twenty years ago there were 40,000 coalminers in Spain and Asturias was one of the country's most prosperous regions. Today there are 9,000 coalminers left in the dwindling industry, but a total of 50,000 jobs in the coal mining communities would be affected by the closure of the coal mines.

One coal miner was reported as saying: "This is not the first time miners have fought for all workers". The coalminers three-week march through the hot, dusty La Mancha region of central Spain elicited much support and solidarity from people who gave them food, water and shelter, the Spanish Red Cross was on hand to attend to any injuries and sore feet, and like athletes on a marathon they had regular food and water stations. This all demonstrated that the working class can work in co-operation in pursuit of a common interest.

Socialists recognise that the strike is a weapon of the working class in their struggle with the capitalist class. Socialists stand with the working class in their necessary battles with capital but it is important to continually point out that the real objective to aim for is the abolition of the wages system; the replacement of capitalism with socialism. The battles of the Asturian coalminers to save their jobs and communities are secondary to the ultimate goal which should be the whole world for all the workers.

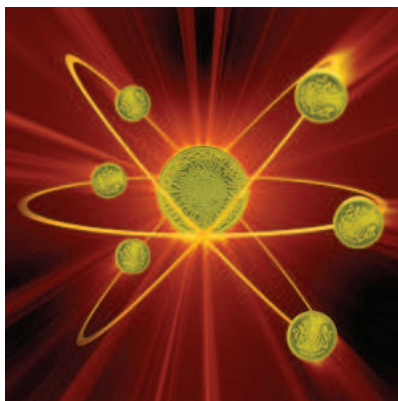
Marx wrote that class struggles like that in places like Asturias were like "unavoidable guerrilla fights that incessantly spring up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market". Working class struggles with the capitalist class are one fertile ground for the development of socialist consciousness and workers coming together in a Marxist socialist party to take political power. If the working class use elections intelligently they can win power by sheer force of numbers. The main lessons of syndicalism and general strikes such as 1926 in Britain and 1968 in France is their ultimate failure because state power remained with the minority capitalist class.

## Higgs story in the making

LAST MONTH'S big science news, perhaps the news of the decade, was the Higgs discovery, or rather the discovery of a new particle of some sort which may or may not be the Higgs or some relative, close friend, neighbour or chat-room acquaintance thereof. Ask anyone on the street what the significance of this is and they will cheerfully tell you they've no idea. The physicists are none too sure either. Their jubilation is due to a twofold success story, the one of theory, the other of experimental ingenuity. Theorists can dream up all sorts of exotic ideas, but testing them is quite another matter. The Large Hadron Collider and its two detectors CMS and ATLAS are probably the most complex machines ever built by humans. They would be a triumph of engineering even if they hadn't found anything. The discovery doesn't push back the boundaries of the unknown, nor even positively confirm what is known. Like a man found at a crime scene holding the murder weapon, the particle may look guilty as hell, but so far the evidence is all circumstantial and other interpretations are possible. Even if it cries 'Fair cop, guv, I'm the one wot done it', it's just one gangland boss in a whole shadowy organisation, behind which lurk the elusive grandmasters gravity, supersymmetry (maybe) and who knows what else? The Higgs does not so much expand our collective knowledge as confirm the majestic scale of our ignorance.

Socialists spend a lot of time talking about what capitalism does badly, but it behoves us to acknowledge too when capitalism does something well. Science has been a galloping success and its expansion shows no sign of slowing down but instead is accelerating. It is sobering to reflect that Einstein in his prime had no idea that galaxies existed. The fact that the universe itself, like science, is also expanding and that this expansion is accelerating is a fact now probably known to most schoolchildren, yet it was not known when Tony Blair's New Labour came to power, and the Nobel prize for this discovery was awarded just last year.

This is one of the most contradictory and confusing aspects of capitalism. It is not just averagely good or bad at doing things, it is amazingly good and bad at doing things. When the history



of this epoch comes to be written, perhaps by future socialist scholars, people will scratch their heads over the triumphant success of experimental high energy physics on the one hand, and the utter failure of society to make any progress over climate change on the other. How is it that we could explore, with an unprecedented level of cooperation,

cost, accuracy and dedication, the fundamental nature of matter, while managing to overlook the fact that our collective laboratory was burning down around us? Why did we pour such ingenuity into, say, fat research while ignoring mass starvation, or epidemiology while doing nothing to stop the epidemics of easily preventable diseases?

It's all about the money, obviously. Some might wonder why 111 states, with their eye always on the accounts, ever came to pay £6bn for an experiment which shows no obvious prospect of producing a financial return, especially when these same

states show no similar cooperation over climate control. But that is to forget the casino nature of the system. Capitalism backs science like a gambler backs horses, expecting losses but hoping for a few big wins. Nobody has any idea whether or how the Higgs might represent a win in money terms. It may do or it may not. The Caderache fusion reactor (*Pathfinders*, May 2012) will probably cost three or four times this amount, and



White elephant in orbit?

may produce nothing useful. Roughly \$150bn has so far been lofted into orbit in support of the International Space Station, with so far not much science done and again no sign of a payoff (*New Scientist*, 14 July).

What is certain is that poor people don't

pay, no matter how much research you put in, no matter what experiments you do. Putting food in a hungry child's mouth is never going to make any sense in capitalism. That horse simply won't run. Climate control, similarly, is a loser. Collective rationality just doesn't come into it. Expecting capitalist states to agree to climate control is like expecting trees in a forest not to try to outgrow each other. Whoever cheats will gain an advantage, so everyone must cheat. Even though everyone ultimately exhausts themselves in the effort, nobody can afford to be left behind in the race.

So while we should acknowledge the amazing success of science within capitalism we have to recognise its political context. Its achievements are those which capitalism wants, its agenda that which capitalism writes. Those who support science can sometimes fall into the habit of reifying it as an ideal, as a 'value-free' quest for knowledge which transcends all other considerations. For them, the portrait of the astronomer peering through his telescope and writing his notes can never be anything other than a noble vision. But we are not living in a noble vision and science does not exist in a bubble. Outside the quiet observatory the world is immersed in chaos and murder. For all its monumental achievements, science can never really be true science while it is forced to flow down the channels money cuts for it. And human society will never be truly scientific, no matter how far it pursues the secret facts of nature, while it continues to ignore the salient facts of life.

## Users: 1 - software mafia: 0

ONGOING TRIBULATIONS with capitalism's attempts to commodify the unquantifiable: knowledge. Now in a major blow to the software industry the European Union has ruled that software companies have no right to prevent customers from reselling old second-hand titles (*New Scientist*, 14 July). Up to now the software mafia have insisted that knowledge is a hitherto unique type of commodity, where you don't buy the thing itself but instead buy a licence to use it. Since this militates against most people's conception of common sense in capitalism, it was widely misunderstood or disregarded. How, people wondered, could you buy something and still not own it? The new ruling throws out this bizarre anomaly, but it does more than that, for who is to say who's bought what from whom in the second-hand market? The worst fears of the industry will now be realised, to the delight of users, as we all go around 'selling' each other our software for a notional penny. Which we may never get round to paying. It's nice to see, for a change, capitalism's efforts to create artificial scarcity being given the bum's rush.



# 99 problems and the rich are one

IT IS nice to see Occupy London explain its general ideological direction at greater length than we've seen in its meetings and previous writings in the June issue of *The Occupied Times* of London. (*The Occupied Times* is produced by an 'autonomous working group of Occupy London general assembly'). The initial statement on 16 October 2011 agreed by a 'gathering of Occupy London' leaves a little to be desired, and though Global Occupy Manifesto (May 2012) did consult international Occupy groups, Occupy London was not consulted to publish. *The Occupied Times* describes itself as 'self-funded' and states that it 'does not operate an open-door policy like most other working groups, instead taking the form of an affinity group'.

Issue 14 carries a debate on whether capitalism can be ethical. This is written comprehensibly and well. Capitalism's defender can barely be bothered to defend capitalism at all, calling instead for ethical consumerism. Its critic gives Marx a mention and writes well but sprawlily and concludes his piece with a call for a sustainable economy or, seemingly, for a zero-growth economy. Though it's easy to

read, it's not so easy to understand the detail of the author's alternative proposal.

The issue also carries a correction of media reports on the verifiability of vacant tents, criticism of specific corporations and specific directors, criticism of the Olympics, pieces on the transatlantic slave trade Gullah/Geechee culture, the Medieval Icelandic Althing, and a Venezuelan documentary, Hip Hop Revolution, an irreverent look at tax resistance (more interesting than it sounds), various international reports and a

free plug for London Chapter of the International Organisation for Participatory Society (IOPS). There is also a critical report on an autonomous group, Occupy Faith UK, which is rightly suspicious about co-option by faiths promising not to proselytise. An editor comments: 'you can't get much more hierarchical than gods'.

Transcending Liberalism by Steven MacLean is by far the best article about liberalism in the Occupy movement. He writes:

'While the occupation at St Paul's outlived most in the US,

the movement here remains in the shadow of Occupy wall street. for OWS, the eviction of the camps turned out to be a blessing. Instead of focusing on site management and internal politics, occupiers were given an opportunity to shift tactics and look outwards, focusing on new directions for the movement. Meanwhile, the occupations in London rumbled on defiantly, but vital energy was expended on their upkeep. The occupation of physical space increasingly divided 'occupiers' from sympathetic members of the public, resulting in an exclusive lifestyle. We had created a 'social' without the 'movement', while in the US, Occupy remained an accessible wave of public outrage.'

Although the Occupy Movement is still a work in progress, *The Occupied Times* of London seems relatively editorially free from attachment to some of the dubious ideas in Occupy. In any case, irrational or inaccurate ideas might tend to be undermined in a relatively open publication. A letters page would probably be redundant in the internet-minded Occupy movement, and Occupied Times of London do call for contributions - so seem committed to participation. If the content and commitment of Occupied Times is anything to go by, and the Occupy Movement can resist co-option by hierarchies and defend horizontalism, it will probably sustain the momentum to continue into another year.

**DJW**



## Party News

### Summer School

THIRTY-FIVE attended the annual Socialist Party Summer School in Birmingham over the weekend of 6-8 July. The theme of the school was Protest.

Janet Surman opened with a talk on the Arab Spring as seen from her ring-side seat in nearby Turkey. She observed that, despite employing some violence, the dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia had not been able to maintain themselves in the face of mass and essentially peaceful popular opposition.

Mike Foster described the increased, and increasing, powers that the police in this country have been given in recent years to deal with demonstrations including infiltrating protest groups. A discussion arose out of his description of last year's riots as 'mindless'. Some challenged this on the grounds that, whereas the riots certainly had no theoretical content or political programme, they were nevertheless a practical criticism of present-day society.

A similar theme came up in the discussion after Ian Barker, of Occupy Norwich, had described what happened there. Occupy, he said, had deliberately avoided making specific policy proposals; in Norwich they had merely drawn up a list of agreed general principles which an alternative society should

embody. In his talk, Stair, from our East Anglia branch, said that the list though largely unobjectionable was far too vague, but at least a space for discussions had been provided; these were continuing at regular meetings at an indoor venue to which branch members were contributing.

Bill Martin spoke on the crowd scenes in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Although Shakespeare's depiction of the crowd as a fickle mob reflected the views of the propertied classes of the time, he had been obliged to put the opposing view if only to knock it down. Shakespeare owned land in Warwickshire and so must have been aware of the protests there in his day against enclosure of common land with crowds levelling the fences and digging the land.

In his talk Glenn Morris argued that, while protests against the pollution of the land, sea and air were justified, they would not get very far if they assumed that a solution could be found within the profit-driven capitalist system.

### Meeting with Zeitgeist

On 22 July 40 people attended a meeting in Hammersmith, London, between the Socialist Party, as part of the World Socialist Movement, and the Zeitgeist Movement.

There was agreement that the only framework within which the main problems facing humanity could be solved was one where the resources of the Earth had

**continued page 22**



## Science facts and science fiction

SEVERAL NEWS stories compete for our attention this month. The Higgs boson discovery, the revelation by religious scholars in Louisiana that the Loch Ness Monster is real and therefore proof that the Theory of Evolution is wrong (*The Herald*, Scotland, 24 June) and, of course, the BIG story: the marriage break-up of world famous Scientologist, Tom Cruise.

Which to choose? It's a toss-up between the Higgs boson and Tom Cruise. (Unfortunately we can't offer marriage guidance on this column, so we'll have to stick to the Scientology aspect of the story.)

Can these phenomenal stories be explained in simply?

Our thanks are due to the *Guardian's* G2 'Shortcuts' column for the following: 'The Higgs Boson is an elementary scalar particle first posited in 1962, as a potential by-product of the mechanism by which a hypothetical, ubiquitous quantum field – the so-called Higgs field – gives mass to elementary particles. More specifically, in the standard model of particle physics, the existence of the Higgs Boson explains how spontaneous breaking of electroweak symmetry takes place in nature'.

Got that? Good. That should get you through even the most challenging pub discussion on the subject. Now we can move on to the advanced stuff, the minefield of theology and metaphysics that must be overcome before attempting to understand Scientology



(or Tom Cruise, for that matter).

First let [www.scientology.org](http://www.scientology.org) explain why man is a spirit: 'Ask someone to close their eyes and get a picture of a cat, and they will get a mental image picture of a cat. Ask them who is looking at the picture of the cat and they will respond 'I am'. That which is looking at the cat is you, a spirit. One is a spirit, who has a mind and occupies a body. You are you in a body'.

All clear so far? Now here's a quote attributed to sci-fi writer and founder of Scientology, L Ron Hubbard: 'You don't get rich writing science fiction. If you want to get rich, start a religion'. Yes, it's all beginning to fall into place.

Having got that sorted we're ready to consider Scientology's theory of human origins. We've learnt from the born-again brigade that evolution is only a theory. But according to Scientology even the stuff about Adam and Eve and the talking serpent is a bit dubious too.

What really happened is that 75 million years ago an intergalactic ruler called Xenu herded the populations of 76 planets together, dropped them into volcanoes, and vaporised them with nuclear bombs. The souls of the victims were then forced to watch a 3D movie for 36 days which implanted all sorts of misleading data into their memories. We are descended from them.

There's a bit more to it than that, but we only get 500 words in this column. It's covered in great detail on the internet though.

It's almost as bizarre as believing in a virgin birth, the raising of the dead and the turning of water into wine. You couldn't make it up, could you? Unless you were a sci-fi writer. Who needs facts when you've got faith and unquestioning belief?

NW

## Brief Reports

the research team, "it's true that the seed crops only cost around half a million to develop, but

we need nine and a half million for security to keep the anti-GM protestors out."

David Cameron has said in a speech on rail investment that he is as committed to the coalition government as he ever was: "This government is not going off the rails. It's as safe as houses... er, and you can bank on it."

One in eight soldiers has attacked someone after coming home from a combat deployment, according to an MoD-funded study of 13,000 personnel. 'This is appalling', the Defence Secretary said yesterday, 'no wonder we can't beat the bloody Afghans. I'm ordering an investigation into why 7 out of 8 of our troops are such Nancies.'

The UK economy should enjoy an "Indian summer" after a poor first half of the year, says a leading forecaster. Speculation continues over the decision to hand over the task of financial projections to the Met Office, where an insider reported that 'we always get the blame anyway, so it makes sense for those bastards at the Treasury to stab us in the back too.' House prices were washed away in the Midlands last week as the FTSE fell nine inches in a single trading day. A cold front over the Euro is blamed for the worst summer on record.

After their success at finding the Higgs boson, scientists at CERN are planning to fire politicians at each other in the giant collider to see if any truth falls out. Said one physicist: 'Politicians observe many of the laws of quantum mechanics, including uncertainty, entanglement and occupying multiple positions simultaneously. Their known properties however explain very little of what goes on in the real world. Up to 96 percent of their physical reality occupies a domain known as 'Doesn't Matter'. We think they may be WIMPs. We also hope to investigate whether they have invisible superheavy partners called the Soron, the Warron and the Bilderbergon.' A sigma-5 level discovery is currently considered unlikely, CERN says: 'Politicians decay very rapidly into other forms, such as chairmen or business consultants, and data is often corrupted. There is a high statistical probability of false positives. Given enough collisions, some of them will tell the truth by accident without even realising it.'

British plant scientists at the John Innes Centre in Norwich have won a \$10m Gates Foundation grant to develop GM cereal crops for third world farmers with little access to fertilisers. "We're delighted to get this grant," said the head of





## In or out, who cares?

BECAUSE PRICES are lower – and because there's no music – many people drink at Wetherspoon pubs. But there is a price to pay: having to put up with the company's founder and chairman, Tim Martin trying to force his views down your throat.

He's a common-or-garden Eurosceptic who's against the euro and wants to save the pound, a view you don't have to go to a Wetherspoon pub to hear. Naturally, he's delighted with the euro's current difficulties. "The euro project has failed," he rejoices in the June-July issue of *Wetherspoon News*, asking, "So, why do its advocates with no nous or economic judgement still wield enormous influence over Britain?"

His answer is that it's because they ("Howe, Heseltine, Blair, Clarke, Mandelson and so on") all went to Oxbridge and are "swots who don't like the idea of the great unwashed having an equal vote". That's a silly argument as there are plenty of Oxbridge swots who are against the euro.

Still, why are so many members of the establishment in favour of the EU? It's a question of the economic interest of the dominant section of the capitalist class in Britain. As the British capitalist economy is heavily dependent on exports, they want tariff-free access to the vast, single European market that has been created and where half of Britain's exports go.

A single currency is a logical accompaniment of a single market. What the euro amounts to is a decision by the participating states to permanently fix the exchange rate between their currencies and to change the name of their currency to "euro". This reinforces the level playing field by preventing one state gaining a competitive advantage by making their exports cheaper through a depreciation of their currency.

One reason why those in charge of British capitalism decided to stay out of the euro was to retain this option. But they don't want the other EU members to have it. Cameron and Osborne may seem hypocrites in not wanting the euro-zone to break up but they know that, if it did, the other major EU states would be free to boost their exports by depreciating their currencies.

From their perspective, tub-thumping populists like Tim Martin, UKIP and the Tory eurosceptics are being short-sighted, and even detrimental to the dominant capitalist interest, in wanting the euro to fail and, certainly, in wanting Britain to withdraw from the EU. But then Tim Martin, as a capitalist catering to the home consumer market, is not a member of the dominant section.

They know that, if Britain did withdraw, while it might still have access to the single European market it would only be on the terms that Norway now has of having no say in drawing up its rules and regulations. Better, they reckon, to stay in and use the veto to defend any economic interest considered vital (as all the other big EU members do).

But they've got a political problem. They have to balance the general interest of the dominant section of the capitalist class against the popular xenophobia against Europe (just try discussing the issue in any pub). It is because there is a chance that they could lose a straight in-or-out referendum that they are against giving "the great unwashed" this choice, not because they are stuck-up swots from Oxbridge. Any referendum they offer will be on some loaded question designed to elicit a "yes" result.

But who wants a referendum anyway? Not us. British capitalism's relationship to the capitalist EU is a purely capitalist problem of no concern to workers.

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FEW OF us have any real understanding of the secretive world of intelligence and undercover operations. Spy thrillers are hardly a reliable guide. But perhaps we can learn a bit from the revelations of whistleblowers – disillusioned insiders who decide to tell all and damn the consequences.

I have before me memoirs by two American whistleblowers – Susan Lindauer, *Extreme Prejudice: The Terrifying Story of the Patriot Act and the Cover Ups of 9/11 and Iraq* (2010) and Sibel Edmonds, *Classified Woman: The Sibel Edmonds Story* (2012). Both books are self-published. Which could mean either that no publisher would risk taking them or that no publisher thought them credible.

Lindauer was a CIA “asset” who represented the US in unacknowledged and therefore deniable “back-channel” communications with various governments. She negotiated an agreement with the government of Saddam Hussein that took all declared American interests into account but still failed to avert the US attack on Iraq. She says that when she blew the whistle, she was arrested on obscure charges under the Patriot Act and that while she was in prison an attempt was made to declare her insane and forcibly drug her.

Edmonds translated tapped telephone conversations from Turkish and Persian sources for the FBI. She discovered that a colleague was working for the very businessmen it was their task to monitor and says when she tried to persuade her bosses to do something about it she was fired. She was also branded a traitor by the government of her native Turkey, to which she could no longer safely return.

## Pillars of society

The official mission of the FBI is to fight dangerous forms of organized crime like terrorism, money laundering and the illegal trade in narcotics, arms, nuclear components, and military and industrial secrets. The trouble for FBI agents who sincerely want to pursue this mission is that many of the criminals engaged in these activities are extremely well-connected and influential – real ‘pillars of society’. As Edmonds remarks, most of us associate global crime with gun-toting gangsters and Mafiosi. However,

“Turkish criminal networks consist mainly of respectable-looking businessmen (including top international CEOs), high-ranking military officers, diplomats, politicians and scholars.” (p. 97)

These respectable people employ the best lobbying firms and cultivate (to put it more crudely, buy) equally respectable American public officials and Pentagon, State Department and White House bureaucrats, securing hundreds of millions of dollars a year in US government

contracts for Turkish companies.

Naturally, those officials and bureaucrats do not want to receive FBI reports about the criminal activity of their partners. They made it clearly understood that even raising such delicate matters, let alone acting on them, would “irreparably damage our relations with a key ally.”

Nor did Bush Administration officials want to endanger even more lucrative relations with another “key ally” by having the connections of prominent Saudis with Islamist terrorism brought to their attention. It was much more convenient to blame Saddam.

This does not mean that nuclear non-proliferation, prevention of terrorist attacks and other declaratory goals are completely phoney. In principle, some policy makers might like to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons. And they do not relish the prospect of being blown to pieces in their plush air-conditioned offices. It is just

that they do not give these issues high priority. Other things take precedence. Especially making money.

Terrorism, of course, is only a bad thing when it is directed against ‘us’. The CIA has always been happy to fund and promote terrorism against Russia and other rival powers. Sometimes terrorists escape the control of their patrons and ‘bite the hand that fed them’. This is known in the trade as blowback.

## Divided agencies

Neither of the whistleblowers gives

credence to the theory that the Bush Administration actually arranged the attacks of September 11, 2001. Lindauer, however, speculates without any proof that a rogue group of US intelligence agents could have given the terrorists a helping hand by laying explosives under the Twin Towers.

In the weeks and days leading up to September 11 it wasn’t easy to discern what exactly top US officials wanted. They received warnings of imminent terror attacks from their own agents and from other governments (the French, for instance), but appeared not to heed them. How was their unresponsiveness to be interpreted? Most likely they were ‘in denial’ – their heads stuck firmly in the sand.

Some agents continued right up to the last moment to repeat the warnings and urge the adoption of countermeasures – for example, the deployment of anti-air defences on the roofs of threatened buildings. Others took a different view.

What makes such things possible is the division of intelligence agencies into numerous small groups that are isolated from one another and responsible only to the very top of the government hierarchy. When – as evidently often happens – they find themselves without clear guidance from above, they may begin to act autonomously and at cross purposes.

STEFAN







# Jeremy spansks the baby

EVERY SO often the political firmament witnesses the emergence of a Rising Star, suitably welcomed by the party leaders as evidence of their resolve to bring fresh minds with new ideas to their tortured deliberations. For the Rising Star as well, it can be exciting, with hardened journalists pursuing them for their behind-the-doors revelations on the latest Cabinet scandal, the anguish of rivals left beneath them as they ascend the Greasy Pole and, as climax to all this, assumptions about record sales for an audaciously revealing volume of memoirs. And of course there would be the quivering excitement from the terror of television appearances fending off a notoriously ruthless interviewer while defending government policies in some current emergency.

## Accountant

Conservative MP for North Norwich, Chloe Smith, came into the Commons in July 2009 as a Rising Star and, aged 27, the Baby of the House. She took the seat previously held by Labour's Ian Gibson, who resigned over irregularities exposed in his expense claims. Fresh-faced as a member of the school hockey team, flashing a wide, ready smile, Smith may have been a relief to the Norwich voters after the tawdry scandal of the fiddling by those outworn parliamentary manipulators. She held the seat at the 2010 election and, after a spell as a Conservative whip, was abruptly elevated to Economic Secretary to the Treasury – in fact benefitting from another scandal, that of Tory Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, who had to resign over his relationship to his 'adviser' Adam Werrity. Among the resentful mutterings of disappointed rivals ('inexperienced but super loyal' was one grouse) there were suggestions that perhaps Smith's promotion was intended to pacify women voters after the cuts in Child Benefit rather than through any merits of hers. In fact, at the time the Prime Minister, Cameron, was under the impression that she was a Chartered Accountant – which seemed to be a recommendation to him on the theory that anyone qualified in that way was sure to be able to control and direct capitalism into an ordered, beneficial society – something his government was clearly unable to do. In any case, when Smith owned up to him that she was not an accountant he dismissed this as irrelevant, and with the words, 'never mind!' he welcomed her into his Cabinet.

## U Turn

Safely on the Front Bench, Smith had a name – the Ice Maiden – which she earned for her coolness under the kind of pressures which ministers are expected to meet pretty well daily. This was pretty seductive stuff and it may have persuaded her to put herself forward for an assignment which many of her colleagues would have gone to some lengths to avoid. This came when the government announced that it would postpone a rise in fuel tax the day after insisting that it would impose it. The move was hailed as yet another policy U-turn, symptoms of a government that was disastrously muddled in its efforts to manage the economy. Smith volunteered to appear on *Newsnight* in the hope of representing the U-turn as good news for everyone, although she knew this would expose her to being grilled by the merciless Jeremy Paxman, whose victims include the likes of Michael Howard, William Hague and Tony

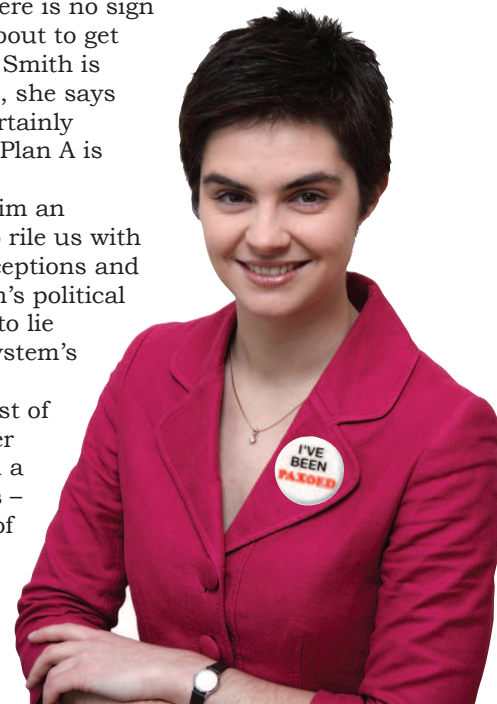
Blair. Smith seemed quite unable to have memorised the kind of transparent evasions which are commonly used by politicians when they are in such straits. Not at all the super-cool informed minister, she fumbled her way through, allowing Paxman to ask at one point: 'Is this some sort of joke?' and at another: 'You ever think you are incompetent?' Which in one sense helped Smith as it diverted some of the Tories' anger onto Smith's boss George Osborne who was taking a relaxed dinner at Number Eleven while she faced Paxman at his most rampant.

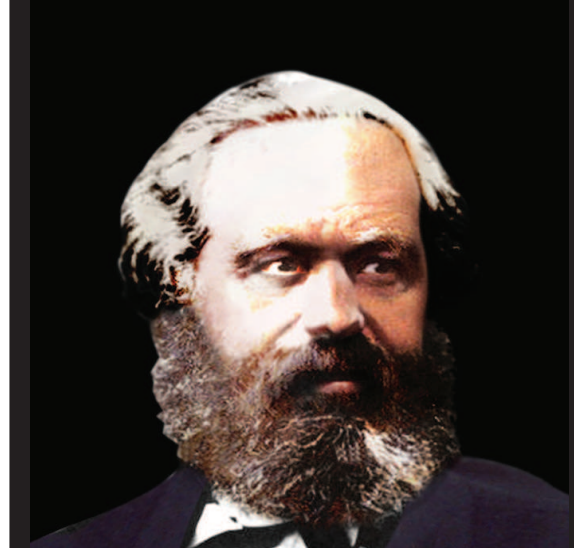
## McBride

Such are the perils of a minister's job it is often necessary for them to be 'briefed' before explaining away some embarrassing facts. A master practitioner of this art was Damian McBride, one of Gordon Brown's most aggressive spin doctors, who recalls a session to prepare the new Prime Minister by shouting abuse at him in a private room at the Treasury: 'Blood on your hands...!'; 'You're a murderer...!'; and, in summary: 'Sod off you Scottish git!'. This degrading but typical episode is illustrative only of the brutal cynicism of capitalism and the demands of its politics. In any case, would it have helped Smith if she had been subjected to the same preparation? We might all have our own ideas about the style of the abuse she deserved, except that that would be no less futile than McBride's sessions with Brown. And then there is the fact that Smith has presented herself as one Baby who could be pretty tough. At university her interests were not politics but 'drinking and dancing with the best of them'. She expels any tensions playing badminton, swearing or 'turning the air blue' as one opponent put it. She tells us that as a minister 'I focus very hard on the job in hand,' which in her case includes child poverty, the size of which is testified by many published facts and figures. The Department for Communities and Local Government recently stated that there are still more than two million children living in what is officially termed as poverty, with a 14 percent rise to over 50 thousand in households officially accepted as homeless – the highest since 1998. There is no sign that this situation is about to get any less desperate but Smith is not impressed: there is, she says trendily, 'no Plan B, certainly not' because 'we know Plan A is working.'

Paxman's job gives him an opportunity at times to rile us with his exposure of the deceptions and diversions of capitalism's political leaders. Smith's job is to lie her way through the system's implacable misery and waste, even if at the cost of her humiliation. Neither of them is interested in a proper response to this – a valid, ready method of so changing society as to leave the politicians and preening media stars to a disreputable past.

IVAN





# Debt, money and Marx

*David Graeber's much talked of Debt: The First 5,000 Years is what the title suggests – a history of debt since ancient times. Debt, that is, in the broadest sense, since Graeber discusses theological conceptions of debt as something humans owe to gods or to God or to society, which is rather remote from the more usual sense of owing money.*

Graeber sets out to refute the idea put forward by Adam Smith and followed by others that money arose out of barter. Smith argued that all humans had a “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” and so that barter would have been the original way in which they exchanged the products of their different trades. As barter has the inconvenience that those wanting to exchange have to have what each wants, at some stage money is invented as something that can be exchanged for anything.

As an anthropologist, Graeber is able to show that there never have been any economies based on barter. It's a myth, but the founding myth of conventional economics and still adhered to in modern economics textbooks. In a footnote (p. 395) Graeber suggests that “the idea of a historical sequence from barter to money to credit...reappears at least in tacit form in Marx”. This is fair enough to an extent, as in his ‘critique of political economy’ (the subtitle of *Capital*) Marx did accept some of the historical facts as perceived by Adam Smith and others

whose ideological conclusions he was critiquing.

One of these historical assumptions was that barter preceded money. The theory of money that Marx expounds in the opening chapters of *Capital*, however, is that money is a commodity that can be exchanged for any other commodity, i.e. it is what he called a ‘general equivalent’. This is not a theory of money as an invention or social convention to overcome the inconveniences of barter. It is, rather, a theory of the way in which the social relationship that links separate commodity producers appears externally as a

thing.

Marx's analysis of money was not a historical description of how money evolved but a theory of what money is, irrespective of how it evolved. It is therefore not affected by later researches such as Graeber's which suggest that money as a general equivalent did not in fact evolve out of barter. This said, Marx is very much with the money-as-commodity school as opposed to the money-as-credit theorists with whom Graeber seems to have more sympathy.

## Social currencies

But if money didn't arise from barter, how did it arise? In fact, what is money? Most would say that money is something that can be exchanged for anything else, i.e. that it is a means of exchange, typically (but not exclusively) coins and, these days, notes. Graeber accepts that this is one aspect of money, but emphasises another: its function as a general unit of account allowing different products to be compared. Once again as an anthropologist, he is able to show that money in this form existed before coins.





The first example he gives is of human groups where dowries and compensation for killing or injuring someone or impugning their honour are quantified. The general unit in which these are measured can be anything and has varied from cowrie shells to cattle. As these items do circulate (pass from one person to another) he calls them “social currencies” and the groups which practice this he calls “human economies”. But these cowrie shells, etc were not used to acquire items of everyday use:

“All of this, it is important to emphasize, can happen in places

was there nevertheless money? Can money be said to exist if there is just a general unit of account without the circulation of the material which is its substance? In any event, Graeber proves his point that before there were coins there wasn’t just barter.

Coins, i.e. uniform pieces of metal stamped according to their weight by the rulers of a state, are generally accepted to have first come into existence in the kingdom of Lydia (in what is now Turkey) around 600 BC. Graeber makes a good case for saying that this was to pay the soldiers the state employed. The use of coins, he says, then spread to Miletus, a Greek

perhaps, the first city in the world where everyday transactions came to be carried out primarily in coins instead of credit” (p. 245).

Thus states (not barter) were at the origin of money. Graeber goes further and argues that markets too, as places where everyday things can be acquired in exchange for coins, were also the creation of states. In other words, markets were dependent on states from the start. This allows him to refute the free-marketeer idea that government-free markets have existed or could exist (which in fact is part of the barter myth).

### Commercial credit

Commerce (merchant’s capital) existed long before industrial capital (capital invested in production) and many of the arrangements for paying for goods that were traded over long distances were developed in pre-capitalist societies: arrangements for clearing payments at mediaeval fairs in Europe, for instance, and ‘paper money’ (actually, paper trade bills: credit given to merchants till they sold their goods) in China in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. Cheques, Graeber points out, were in use in the Islamic world in mediaeval times, the Arabic word *saqq* being the origin of the English word ‘cheque’.

These are all credit arrangements which Graeber uses to back up the thesis advanced in his book that



where markets in ordinary, everyday goods – clothing, tools, foodstuffs – do not even exist. In fact, in most human economies, one’s most important possessions could never be bought and sold for the same reasons that people can’t: they are unique objects, caught up in a web of relationships with human beings” (p. 208).

But if they are not used, and cannot be used to buy things are they really money?

### Shekels and the State

Graeber’s second example is of the states that existed in the Middle East from 3500 to 800 BC, especially Sumer (the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, now part of modern Iraq). Here there were both taxes (debts to the state) and commercial and personal loans to acquire things. These were also expressed in a common unit (a shekel which was a weight of silver) but this rarely changed hands as debts and taxes were settled in kind with such useful things as wheat, whose quantity was determined by its silver equivalent. There were no coins, but

*Above: modern day barter in Mexico. Below: pre-coin currencies of Bulgaria*



city and port on the Ionian coast of the Aegean Sea:

“It was Ionia, too, that provided the bulk of the Greek mercenaries active in the Mediterranean at the time, with Miletus their effective headquarters. Miletus was also the commercial center of the region, and,

there is a historical cycle of periods during which trade is based on credit and when it is based on bullion. According to him, after the USA finally went off the Gold Standard in 1971, we may have entered another age in which the credit will come to be regulated, as it was in previous



credit ages. During these times debts were periodically cancelled (the original meaning of the word



**'Social currencies': from cattle to shells**

"jubilee") and the charging of interest on loans for consumption was banned.

### What is capitalism?

When discussing relatively modern times (1450 to 1971) Graeber asks "So, what is capitalism anyway?" Socialists in the Marxist tradition define capitalism as an economic system based on the production of surplus value by wage workers.

Silicon Valley, with a straight line in between. All those millions of slaves and serfs and coolies and debt peons



disappear, or if we must speak of them, we write them off as temporary bumps along the road" (p. 351).

Graeber should read the chapter in *Capital* on "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist". In it Marx deals with how the capital to launch the industrial revolution was originally acquired: "so-called primitive accumulation" (but which is better translated as "original accumulation"). He lists "colonialism,

the world "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt." This is hardly ignoring the sufferings of pre-industrial producers.

Graeber sees capitalism as this rather than as the investment of money capital in production with a view to extract surplus value from wage-labour. He has confused what states did to hasten capitalism's coming in being with capitalism. He wasn't the first, as Marx notes in the same chapter:

"The great part that the public debt, and the fiscal system corresponding to it, has played in the capitalisation of wealth and the expropriation of the masses, has led many writers, like Cobbett, Doubleday and others, to seek in this, incorrectly, the fundamental cause of the misery of the modern peoples."

People are not exploited today because they are the debt-slaves of the financial system but because they are the wage-slaves of capitalist corporations.

Graeber's view of capitalism as the exploitation of the real economy by some military-financial complex gives credence to those who see the way forward in abolishing the supposed power of banks to create credit out of nothing (a mistaken view Graeber seems to share). Outside



**Dominant image: from the factories of the industrial revolution to Silicon Valley**

These are employed by capitalists or capitalist corporations that have invested money in producing things for sale on a market with a view to profit. Graeber challenges this definition. Marxists, he says,


"still tend to assume that free wage labor is the basis of capitalism. And the dominant image in the history of capitalism is the English workingman toiling in the factories of the industrial revolution, and this image can be traced forward to

the national debt, the modern mode of taxation, and the protectionist system" as methods employed by the state in Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England "to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition". That Marx fully realised what a brutal process this was can be seen from the concluding words of the chapter where he wrote that capital came into

his profession as an anthropologist, Graeber is an anarchist and a member of the IWW and so wants to go to a society in which there will be no wage-labour. However, his inadequate theory of capitalism could lead to any growing anti-capitalist movement getting diverted into mere banking and monetary reform.

**ADAM BUICK**





# An open letter to The Chairman of the Bank of England

## *Dear Sir Mervyn*

Having heard on the BBC news channel on the evening of the 29th June your condemnations and exhortations concerning the practices of your fellow-bankers I am taking the liberty of writing to you to register my surprise at your remarks. It is not my purpose to be offensive but I find it difficult to accept that a man of your knowledge and experience can view the current crisis of capitalism in moral terms or, indeed, as aberrational.

I am an eighty-seven year old man and a great-grandfather which gives me a particular concern for the future. I was born four years before the awful world economic slump of 1929 and I have lived through some eight or nine 'recessions' – as they are euphemistically referred to today. I have witnessed life under the system of capitalism when it was largely unregulated – capitalists had discovered earlier that they required some sort of Queensberry Rules to protect themselves from one another.

Post-1945, when government adopted the war-time National government's commitment to the

Beveridge Report, I experienced Maynard Keynes' antidote to the caprice of the system, via 'demand management': the exchange of bonds for shares and – in recognition that working-class poverty was an endemic feature of capitalism – the institution of a complex scheme of nationalised poverty.

It would be churlish to deny that there was some improvement in social conditions for the producing class: improvement, it has to be said, greatly assisted by the need to make good the awful destruction of the late world war – while frenetically preparing for yet another possible war against our late 'glorious Russian allies' and their Leninist philosophy of trying (vainly, as it turned out) to rationalise commodity production

**"I was born before the world slump of 1929 and I have lived through eight recessions..."**

through central state planning.

While knowledge was constrained by the cash nexus, science in all fields of human endeavour has brought about a geometrical increase in our potential to create the material conditions of a full and happy life for every human being on the planet. Unfortunately much of our fantastically expanded wisdom and wealth has been siphoned into military establishments which are today a vital indigenous segment of the world economy; a segment which often manifests an independent and dangerous threat to human freedom.

The world of my lifetime has seen the economic murder of some eight billion people through starvation, lack of clean water and necessary medication. The food and medication to keep these people alive was available but the men, women and children concerned did not represent a viable market that would yield profit. They died because they were poor.

In the same period I have seen World War Two – the awful sequel to World War One – that brought homes onto battlefields. Now, since the end of WW2, there is at least one

1945-1946-War in Vietnam (1945–1946)	1948-1960-Malayan Emergency	1955-1975-Indonesian invasion of East Timor	1961-1991-Eritrean War of Independence	1964-present)
1945-1949-Indonesian National Revolution	1948-1960-Operation Polo	1956-1956-Hungarian Revolution of 1956	1961-1961-Invasion of Goa	1975-Mozambican War of Independence
1945-1946-Iran crisis of 1946	1950-Ongoing-Korean War	1956-1956-Suez Crisis	1961-1975-Angolan War of Independence	1964-1967-War over Water
1946-1954-First Indochina War	1950-1958-Kuomintang Islamic Insurgency in China (1950–1958)	1957-1958-Iini War	1962-1964-Tuareg Rebellion (1962–1964)	1964-Ongoing-Insurgency in Northeast India
1946-1949-Greek Civil War	1950-1967-Retribution operations	1958-1959-North Vietnamese invasion of Laos	1962-1970-North Yemen Civil War	1964-1964-Zanzibar Revolution
1947-1947-Paraguayan Civil War	1952-1956-Tunisian War of Independence	1959-2011-Basque conflict	1962-1962-Sino-Indian War	1965-1965-Dominican Civil War
1947-1948-Indo-Pakistani War of 1947	1952-1960-Mau Mau Uprising	1960-1961-Campaign at the China–Burma Border	1962-1966-Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation	1965-1966-United States occupation of the Dominican Republic (1965–1966)
1947-1948-1947–1948 Civil War in Mandatory Palestine	1953-1953-1953 Iranian coup d'état	1960-1966-Congo Crisis	1962-1967-Shifta War	1965-1965-Indo-Pakistani War of 1965
1948-1950-Pre-Korean War insurgency	1953-1959-Cuban Revolution	1960-1996-Guatemalan Civil War	1963-1963-Sand War	1965-1979-Civil war in Chad (1965–1979)
1948-1949-1948 Arab–Israeli War	1953-1975-Laotian Civil War	1961-1970-First Kurdish–Iraqi War	1963-1974-Guinea-Bissau War of Independence	1966-1969-Korean DMZ Conflict (1966–1969)
1948-1948-Costa Rican Civil War	1954-1962-Algerian War	1961-1961-Bay of Pigs Invasion	1964-1979-Rhodesian Bush War	1966-1966-Samu Incident
1948-Ongoing-Internal conflict in Burma	1955-1972-First Sudanese Civil War	1961-1961-Bizerte crisis	1964-Ongoing-Colombian armed conflict	1966-1989-South African Border War

major conflict occurring every single day. In fact, the industrialised killing of human beings that arises from the endemic conflicts of capitalism has itself created investment opportunities effectively making international concord a serious economic threat.

Rich list

It is surely legitimate, Sir Mervyn, to ask such as your good self how you think people in what we hope will be a more enlightened future will see the current phase of what we are told is civilisation. How, for example, would a future economic historian see the current *Sunday Times* ‘Rich List’ which shows that the wealth of the one thousand richest people in the UK – a mere 0.003% of the adult population – increased by an incredible £155 billion over the last three years? This in a period when wages and social security benefits were, and are, being slashed and the vision and disagreements of the three political parties, marketing the same political product, is confined to the duration, in years, the working class will have to endure the appalling increase in its miseries.

Moral aphorisms appealing to those who have purloined the means whereby the rest of us live have never restrained the appetites of an owning class. It is said that Jesus got his comeuppance for suggesting the meek – by definition, the poor – should inherit the land. Centuries later, in the dying years of the nineteenth century, when Pope Leo mildly admonished the capitalism of his day, opining that ‘...the wages of the working man ought not be insufficient to support a frugal and well-conducted wage-earner...’ (Encyclical: *Rerum Novarum*. May 1891) public criticism was raised by Italian businessmen who suggested that the promulgation of the document might cause social unrest.

Poverty and riches are two sides of the same coin – almost literally so, for as Shelley put it, ‘Paper coin, [is] that forgery of the title deeds which we hold to something of the worth of the inheritance of Earth’. You cannot be ignorant of the mechanism

by which a small minority class dispossesses the creators of all real wealth of the fruits of their labour and rations their access to their needs through a wages-money system.

Whatever the form of society, real wealth is produced, and can only be produced, by the application of human labour power to nature-given materials. Capitalism adds a third element to this simple equation: investment on foot of the promise of profit. The shareholder, whether s/he is a billionaire or a plumber in a pension scheme, seeks a return on their investment and is rarely persuaded by the needs of ‘the nation’ or their perception of morality. Only the threat in the aforesaid ‘Queensberry Rules’ of the system curbs the pecuniary enthusiasm of the more predatory captains of capital and that, as we are currently learning, is not always the case.

Capital on strike

The labour power that provided the fervid productive activity of, say six years ago, when the system was in relative ‘boom’, is still available as are the natural resources of that period. The missing element is capital; effectively, capital is on strike, holding the nation up to ransom as the pensioned editors of their newspapers proclaim when some group of low-paid workers withdraws their labour. Surely the fact that a small minority of satiated money shufflers can visit such overwhelming hardship on the populace in general (as it does periodically) must bring the entire system into question.

Whatever of the past, when the owner of the local factory lived in the big house on the periphery of the town or village and occasionally visited the local hostelry and even bought the lads a pint, capitalism today is a curse on the lives of the world’s billions. Technology has given it a mobility to seek the cheapest labour, circumvent health and safety standards that might impinge on profits or capital on-costs and to force the hand of allegedly

democratic authority.

The implications in the current crop of chastisements against bankers and those of their ilk is that capitalism is an efficient, humane economic system that offers the human family the best of all possible worlds except when, as now, it falls victim to the ineptitude or greed of some of its functionaries. That is a lie told in defence of the system. Of course there has been abuse, and even absurdity, in the administration of banks and businesses but it was the uncontrollable greed that fuels the system that gave rise to the activities of bankers and speculators. Nor should we forget that it was the approbation of millionaire and billionaire shareholders that justified the fabulous salaries and bonuses so lately enjoyed by now-discredited servants of capital.

The widespread clarion for a public enquiry might expose some of the greedy swindlers whose dishonest activities have added misery to capitalism’s cyclic trade crisis as well as the self-interested manoeuvrings of politicians in all the three main parties. For a while these scoundrels might suffer in comfort the embarrassment of being publicly pilloried. But the system itself, the vile, anachronistic system that brings dire poverty or mere want to most of the people on the planet, will be off the hook.

What we will not have is an incisive enquiry into the question of capitalism’s suitability for purpose and whether socialism, in a clearly defined sense, offers a better way of life for the whole of humanity. That would be much too democratic.

Such are my thoughts. I confess, Sir Mervyn, that I am a ridiculous optimist who thinks human concern and human honesty might occasionally rise superior to the exigencies of office. Additionally, of course, in submitting this to the Editors of the *Socialist Standard*, I would stipulate that publication guarantees your right of reply.

Sincerely  
RICHARD MONTAGUE

Some of the wars since 1945 (Wikipedia)

1966-1988-Namibian War of Independence	border conflict	1975-1975-Indonesian invasion of East Timor	1979-1989-Soviet war in Afghanistan	1983-1983-Invasion of Grenada (1983)
1967-1967-Six-Day War	1969-Ongoing-Papua conflict	1976-1983-Dirty War	1980-1992-Salvadoran Civil War	1983-2009-Sri Lankan Civil War
1967-1975-Cambodian Civil War	1970-1971-Black September in Jordan	1976-1976-Operation Entebbe	1980-2000-Internal conflict in Peru	1983-2005-Second Sudanese Civil War
1967-1970-Nigerian Civil War	1971-1971-Bangladesh Liberation War	1976-2005-Insurgency in Aceh	1980-1988-Iran–Iraq War	1983-1988-Kurdish Rebellion of 1983
1967-1967-Chola incident	1971-1971-Indo-Pakistani War of 1971	1977-1992-Mozambican Civil War	1980-1981-Second Eritrean Civil War	Part of the Iran–Iraq War
1967-1970-War of Attrition	1972-1974-First Eritrean Civil War	1977-1978-Libyan–Egyptian War	1981-1981-Paguisha War	1984-1987-Siachen conflict
1967-Ongoing-Naxalite-Maoist insurgency	1972-1973-Spring of Youth	1977-1978-Ogaden War	1981-1986-Ugandan Bush War	1985-1985-Achser Strip War
1968-1968-Battle of Karamah	1972-1973-Yom Kippur War	1977-1977-Shaba I	1982-1982-Falklands War	1987-1987-1987 Sino-Indian skirmish
1968-1968-Communist Insurgency War	1974-1974-Turkish invasion of Cyprus	1978-1978-Shaba II	1982-1982-Ndogboyoiso War	1987-1993-First Intifada
1968-1968-The Troubles	1974-1991-Ethiopian Civil War	1978-1978-Lebanon conflict	1982-1982-1982 Lebanon War	1987-1988-Thai–Laotian Border War
1968-1968-Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia	1974-1975-Second Kurdish–Iraqi War	1978-1979-Uganda–Tanzania War	1982-2000-South Lebanon conflict (1982–2000)	1987-Ongoing-Lord's Resistance Army
	1975-2002-Angolan Civil War	1978-1987-Chadian–Libyan conflict	1982-1982-1982 Ethiopian–Somali Border War	
	1975-1991-Western Sahara War	1978-Ongoing-Kurdish–Turkish conflict		
	1975-1990-Lebanese Civil War	1979-1990-Sino-Vietnamese conflicts		
	1975-1989-Cambodian–Vietnamese War	1979-1982-Civil war in Chad (1979–1982)		
	1975-Ongoing-Insurgency in Laos			



# "Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible"

"Be realistic, demand the impossible" (Situationist graffiti, Paris, May 1968)

**M**arseilles in June: the French legislative elections and Euro 2012 on TV; a street market; the smell of tree blossom; voices in French and Arabic; the aroma of Provençal cookery or Maghrebi cuisine; and the anise flavour of pastis.

It is 25 years since my last visit to France when, as a student, the important things in life were "French": the 'Cinema du look' of 'Diva', 'Betty Blue' and 'Subway,' which focused on alienated, marginalised young people in Mitterrand's France; the Existentialist philosophy of Sartre in *La Nausée* and of Camus in *L'Etranger*; Tom Vague articles on Situationism, and the May 1968 'événements'; and being fascinated by 'action directe' political violence.

Marseilles' population is one-quarter French, one-third Italian, and one-quarter Maghrebi (Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan) and there are also Africans from the former French colonies such as Mali. During a visit to an Algerian café for a mint tea, I watch the Euro 2012 match France v England on TV and France equalise; the scorer is Samir Nasri, a Marseilles born player of Algerian ancestry.

Algeria gained independence from France in 1962 after a guerrilla war waged by the National Liberation Front (FLN) (dramatised by Gillo Pontecorvo in his 1966 film *La bataille d'Alger*). An unstable bourgeois democracy exists in Algeria

after a long civil war in the 1990s and a state of emergency that lasted twenty years. A poster on a wall in Marseilles calls on "Les citoyens algériens, résidents en France" to boycott the Algerian legislative elections in May 2012.

Marcel Pagnols's plays of the 1930s were set in the docks and bars of Marseilles. The docks are now gentrified and known as 'Vieux Port', and the adjacent district known as 'Le Panier' has been prettified, which is a long way from its notorious reputation in the 1970s as a major heroin den. The local transport infrastructure is impressive, with its municipal-run Metro/Tram/Bus networks which are inexpensive to use. Post-war, Marseilles witnessed a large housing programme and this is symbolized by Le Corbusier's 'La Cité Radieuse' which showed "another world is possible". This experiment inspired imitations and concrete went up everywhere on the outskirts of Marseilles and other French cities. These became known as 'les banlieues', rent-controlled housing estates for the working class and beyond the pale for bourgeois society. In 2005, les banlieues were gripped by civil unrest for three weeks.

The emergency services sirens may be more subdued here but the state in the shape of the CRS riot police is in evidence. The CRS is notorious for its brutality towards young people, protesters and the Maghrebi and African populations. In the centre of an Algerian/African market, a CRS

armoured truck is provocatively and obtrusively parked up.

On late night French TV talking heads discuss, "Qui était vraiment Mohammed Merah?" the man who was shot dead by the police in Toulouse on March after shooting seven people. France, unlike Britain, does not emphasise 'multiculturalism' but instead is a country proud of its secularism, expecting its 'citizens' to identify with the capitalist Nation-State of the Republic. The French capitalist state certainly does not want the working class to identify with its own class interests as it had done in history such as in 1871 and 1968.

Capitalism in France appears to be doing no so badly considering the world economic recession and the eurozone crisis (GDP growth was 1.7 percent in 2011). Just 45 minutes up country from Marseilles is the bourgeois town of Aix-en-France which is saturated by tourism and consumerism. France is still operating a mixed-economy of state-run industries, and a private sector. There is considerable rail infrastructure; trains and trams are built by Bombardier and Alstom, the cars are Renault, Peugeot and Citroen, and there is a 35-hour working week.

As soon as Hollande was elected President in May he was summoned to Berlin to answer to the financial capitalists in charge in Europe. Recently the German Chancellor criticised Hollande for allowing the

Marseilles





French economy to stall, and his plans to increase the cost to companies of laying off workers does not go down well with capitalist interests.

The 'Parti Socialiste' (PS) won a majority in the parliamentary elections in June. The main issue on French TV was Olivier Forlani of the 'Divers Gauche' standing against PS luminary Segolène Royal and eventually defeating her in the second round. Yet even this was overshadowed by the Feydeau farce



An FLN delegation in 1962

that was Hollande's new partner tweeting she wanted Forlani to win rather than Royal, the President's ex-partner and mother of his four children. The deep sexism in French life was evident when female commentators asked: "How can Hollande run France if he can't control his girlfriend?"

These events are a long way from 'Les événements' of May 1968 when a student strike developed into the largest general strike in history involving 11 million workers (2/3 of the workforce). The country came to a standstill, De Gaulle left the country for Germany to confirm he had the support of the French Army there and workers occupied the means of production. It ended with some concessions but with capitalism and capitalist political control intact.

The abolition of capitalism and the transformation to a socialist society is the only solution to France's many problems. The capitalist class say that socialism is impossible because it is in their class interests to say so. All the 'socialist' parties, Leftist and Trotskyite groups in France offer policies to patch up capitalism and do not offer real socialism and can be described as 'possibilists'. The Socialist Party of Great Britain's sole aim is to achieve the goal of socialism and this has been described as 'impossibilism'. In 1968 in Paris the cry was "Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible" and there can be no other way forward for human society but socialism.

**STEVE CLAYTON**

# America's wars – on drugs



**T**he United States military are stuffing their hired killers with drugs. According to the *Toronto Star* (28 April), after two long-running wars – in Afghanistan and Iraq – more than 100,000 active duty US Army troops last year were taking prescribed anti-depressants, narcotics, sedatives, anti-psychotics and anti-anxiety drugs, caused mainly by escalating combat stress.

Almost 8 percent of active-duty personnel are currently on sedatives; and 6 percent are on anti-depressants, an eightfold increase since 2005. US lawyers are blaming the military's heavy use of psychotropic drugs for their army clients' aberrant behaviour. Troops are sent out on deployment with up to 180 days' supplies of so-called medication, much of which they can swallow at the end of just one "anxious day". And soldiers with injuries easily become dependent on narcotic painkillers.

James Culp, a former army paratrooper, and now a high-profile military defence lawyer, who recently defended an army private accused of non-state murder, rhetorically asked:

"What do you do when 30 to 80 percent of the people that you have in the military have gone on three or more deployments, and they are mentally worn out? What do you do when they can't sleep?"

And he answers himself: "You make a calculated risk in prescribing these medications." Indeed, the modern army psychiatrist's kit is likely to include nine kinds of anti-depressants; benzodiazepines for anxiety, four anti-

psychotics, two kinds of sleep aids and drugs for attention-deficit hyperactivity, according to a 2007 review in the *Military Medicine* journal.

But it wasn't always like that.

There was some early ad hoc use of psychotropic drugs during the Vietnam War. Prior to the war in Iraq, however, American soldiers were not permitted to go into combat on psychiatric drugs. Now, some troops in Afghanistan are prescribed drugs that have been associated with paranoia, rage and violent anger spells, and urges to suicide. And all this following training to kill! And show aggression...

Not surprisingly, an increasing number of soldiers and marines behave similarly when not in combat. James Culp relates just one example among many. Last year, Private David Lawrence murdered a Taliban commander in Afghanistan. He pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to 12½ years, but this was later reduced to 10 when it was revealed he was suffering from schizophrenic episodes. He said he was hearing female voices. He was prescribed Zoloft for depression and Trazodone. The voices got worse and he began seeing hallucinations of the chaplain, minus his head. He then walked into the Taliban's cell, in the jail, and shot him dead. His father said: "They give him a gun and he does that!" Presumably, like most people, Private Lawrence was not normally aggressive or violent. But fighting in one of capitalism's wars made him so.

**PETER E. NEWELL**



# Bauhaus

*'To create a new guild of craftsman, without the class distinctions which raise an arrogant barrier between craftsman and artist' - Walter Gropius*

It is apt for an exhibition about the Bauhaus, the Modernist architecture and design school to be taking place at the Barbican

(till 12 August), that icon of brutalist architecture.

Architect Walter Gropius, inspired by William Morris, established the Bauhaus in Weimar in Germany in 1919 where he aimed to challenge the hierarchy between fine and applied arts, by creating art for the people, fashioning functional artistic products, and creating an aesthetic to counter bourgeois furbelows. Klee wrote it was 'a community to which each one of us gave what he had.' The exhibition features paintings such as Kandinsky's 'Small worlds' and Feininger's 'expressionist' 'Studio window' and 'Cathedral'.

The working class in Berlin went on general strike in the Spartacist uprising of January 1919 and armed struggle ensued. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) government (akin to the Labour Party) brought in Freikorps soldiers to crush the revolutionary uprising, and socialists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were brutally murdered. A year later, when threatened by the right-wing Kapp putsch, the SPD felt no shame in calling on workers to strike to save them. Gropius designed an 'expressionist' Monument to the March Fallen in honour of workers killed in the putsch.

The Bauhaus was part of a cultural renaissance that took place in Weimar Germany which included cinema like 'The Cabinet of Dr Caligari', the theatre of Brecht, paintings by Grosz, the Frankfurt School of Fromm and

Marcuse, Hirschfeld's struggle for sexual law reform, and Reich's 'SexPol' clinics for the

## Attila the Stockbroker

Attila the Stockbroker is currently on tour in Britain, with Rory Ellis.

Rory Ellis is a singer-songwriter-guitarist from Melbourne in the urban folk tradition who sings about street life, referencing the notorious nightclub 'Bojangles' and criminal 'Chopper' Read. Rory's 'Skeleton Hill' is about the gold field heritage site in Victoria in danger of becoming a quarry. His 'Waiting for Armaguard' is a witty and touching song about working-class longing for some material wealth. Rory shows the audience that his fingernails are painted in the black/red/gold colours of the Aboriginal flag.

Attila has said that seeing The Clash at the Rainbow in 1977 politically inspired him. He sings his eulogy for Strummer entitled 'Commandante Joe' during the gig. He, like others on the Left and anarchists like Class War have a tendency to personalise the iniquities of capitalism in the person of Mrs Thatcher. His song 'Maggots 1, Maggie 0' is a good example of this.

Attila is steeped in labour history, referencing Peterloo, the Chartists, and Tolpuddle. His song 'An honour not a stain' is about transportation to Botany Bay. In 2005 he appeared at the Levellers Day in Burford. He sings 'The world upside down' about the Levellers/Diggers of the 1649 English Revolution. A more contemporary song is 'Looters' about the financial capitalists of the City.

Attila has expressed his support for the 'socialist' government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) who ran Afghanistan with USSR support from 1978-92 and this is recounted in his song 'Mohammed the Kabul red'. He has no love for New Labour singing 'New Labour, fuck off and die' and has called it a 'travesty of a socialist party'. He described the 2003 Iraq War as a 'hideous imperialist crusade'. During this tour Attila is writing a column for the *Morning Star*, the newspaper of the Communist Party of Britain (former CPGB). The *Morning Star* describes Attila as 'a non-aligned Communist and a good friend of the *Morning Star*'. He describes himself as a 'freelance leftie', and others have called him 'an anti-fascist social surrealist rebel performance poet'.

Attila's website carries a photograph of himself and his band mates in front of the Karl Marx monument in Karl Marx Stadt in the former DDR. He has written that 'it is up to us, the people, to determine the future and to take power away from the bastards who would destroy our hopes, our communities, our world'. It's a shame he gives his support to reformist policies and state capitalism.



working class.

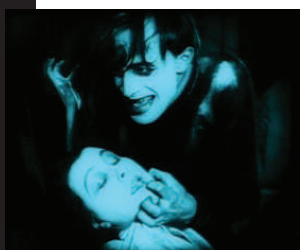
The Bauhaus exhibition features products from its workshops such as the Wagenfeld table lamp, Brandt services, Albers' tables and Breuer chairs. Gropius drew up designs for the 'total theatre' of Brecht-producer Erwin Piscator. The workshops were ultimately making exclusive products for the affluent and not for large-scale manufacture. Gropius had not solved the dilemma that Morris had faced.

In 1928 Marxist architect Hannes Meyer was appointed Bauhaus director and moved away from aesthetics and artistic intuition towards functionality and building theory. He believed buildings should be low-cost and fulfil social needs: 'the people's needs instead of the need for luxury'. Meyer expanded the workshops on a co-operative basis to meet the requirements of industry: his aim, the 'harmonious organisation of our society', and interestingly the Bauhaus made its first profit in 1929. The photography workshop was established; Maholy-Nagy made his trippy film 'A Light Play'; there was the Warholian Metal Party; and the Bauhaus students moved towards Marxism. Gropius had built workers houses for the Torten-Dessau estate, which Meyer extended by building balcony access apartment houses. Meyer also designed the ADGB Trade Union School in Bernau.

Meyer was sacked in 1930 because of the politics and went to Moscow as an architecture professor. Eventually he ended up in Mexico. In the 1930s he was an active participant in the discourse about suppressing the bourgeois concept in architecture.

The Bauhaus was closed in 1933 by the Nazis who deemed its concept as 'degenerate'.

**STEVE CLAYTON**



# OBITUARY

## Ken Smith

WE ARE saddened to have to report the death in June of comrade Ken Smith in Cheltenham at the age of 89. Ken first joined the Socialist Party in London in 1944 after moving in anarchist anti-war circles. He had been conscripted but, in his own words, “was invited to leave the Army after twelve-month’s service and a jail sentence for mutiny.” He worked at various jobs and ran a number of businesses. (He was a pioneer of Sunday trading when it was not yet legal).

Over the years Ken was in and out of the Party for various reasons, including a period when he lived in France. In the 1940s and 1950s he was active in the old Fulham branch. Thirty years later he was in Bristol branch and hosted a number of Party Summer Schools

in his place at Stow Hill in Gloucestershire, the part of the country he hailed from.

In retirement, he published two books *Free is Cheaper* (1988) and *The Survival of the Weakest* (1994). He also wrote for the Socialist Standard. *Free is Cheaper* is an attack on the waste of the market system, making the case that a socialist society, in which there would be no need for money, would use up much fewer resources. Its claim in passing that capitalism was not a necessary historical development raised some eyebrows but, then, Ken was anything but conventional. His other, less successful book argued that the agent for the change to socialism would not be, as traditionally assumed, the working-class movement but rather the Green and environmentalist movement.



## Overproduction

ACCORDING TO Stuart Jeffries in the *Guardian* (5 July), “Marxism is on the rise again”. One of the reasons he gives for this is “its analysis of economic crises”. But what is this analysis?

The problem with trying to describe Marx’s own theory is that he never published a final, worked-out version. In Volume 1 of *Capital* there are some passing references to capitalist production going in cycles “of average activity, production at high pressure, crisis and stagnation”. Apart from that, all we have are drafts and notes on the subject which Engels, Kautsky and Moscow later published as Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*, *Theories of Surplus Value* and the *Grundrisse*, but these drafts are not always entirely consistent with each other.

This has led to a number of different Marxist theories. The explanation we have favoured is that crises are caused during the phase of “production at high pressure” by one key industry (it could be any). This industry, in its anarchic pursuit of profits, comes to overproduce in the market for its products, and this partial overproduction then has a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

Others interpret “overproduction” in a different sense, to mean that capitalism has a tendency for total capitalist production to outstrip total market demand. An example can be found in the January-February issue of *Lalkar* (a publication of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), but it’s a

theory put forward by others who don’t share this party’s policy). The present crisis, it claims:

“is at heart a classic crisis of overproduction, this being the design fault that is built into the capitalist system. As the masses of workers – who make up the bulk of consumers – are, in the interests of profit, paid as little as possible, they are increasingly unable to buy all the increasing mass of commodities that the capitalist enterprises bring to market. This in turn bankrupts the least ‘efficient’ of the capitalist enterprises, causing further job losses and downward pressure on wages caused by an excess of the supply of labour power over the demand for the same. Bankruptcies start to escalate, while economic activity stagnates.”

This is a theory of “underconsumption” rather than of “overproduction”. It ignores the fact that the total capitalist market is not made up just of what workers can afford to buy, not even if capitalist spending on consumer luxuries is added; it also includes what capitalist enterprises re-invest in production, i.e. spend on producer goods.

*Lalkar* offers the following explanation as to why the present crisis didn’t break out earlier:

“However, this process can be, and is, retarded by the simple expedient of the capitalists, who would otherwise find it difficult in the circumstances to invest profitably, lending money to workers to enable them to continue as consumers despite their relative poverty.”

This doesn’t make sense. The capitalist class lend the working class money to buy their goods, but how would they make a profit out of doing this? They would only get their money back.

Working-class borrowing did increase in the period up to the present crisis but this wasn’t done deliberately to prevent production spiralling downwards. It was the

other way round: because production was expanding, banks and other lenders made loans to workers on the assumption that production would continue to expand and so workers would be able to repay out of their future wages both what they had borrowed and the added interest.

A crisis is not caused by working-class consumption going down but by capitalists cutting back their investment in production. It is investment, not consumption, that drives the capitalist economy. This is the essence of Marx’s theory of capitalism, whatever might have been his considered theory of crises had he got round to formulating it.

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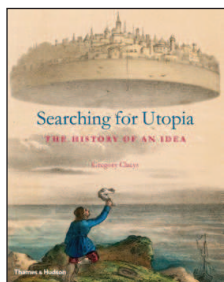
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## Utopia

**Searching for Utopia. The History of an Idea, by Gregory Claeys. Thames and Hudson, London, 2011. £24.95.**



Gregory Claeys has provided an extensive and lavishly illustrated survey of utopian thought. In its early chapters it ranges from ancient origin myths through

to the classic texts of Thomas More. It then moves on to look at the modern era; it includes visions of model communities by Robert Owen and others, and comes right up to date with modern science fiction and dystopian views of the future. Claeys' definition of utopia is broad and covers the exploration in a plausible way of "the space between the possible and the impossible". The role of utopia, for Claeys, is crucial to the process of social change as it transcends the distance between this world and the ideal described. Utopia can be used as a literary means of closing the gap in our imaginations between where we are and where we want to go.

Claeys, however, goes much further in his claims for utopia, without which, he argues: "humanity would never have struggled onwards towards betterment. It is a pole-star, a guide, a reference point on a common map of an eternal quest for the improvement of the human condition" (p.15). In a rather bleak concluding chapter the future of humanity is proffered as hinging on the success of a "realistic utopianism", which is liberal, forward-looking, scientific and tolerant.

For Claeys it is the idea, the vision of society depicted, which drives change. There is no explanation offered as to why ancient societies looked back to religious or mythical origin-myths or why utopia became more and more anchored in this world. Nor is there an exploration of why some utopias fail to connect with wider society whilst others add fuel to rapid social and political change. Claeys points out that ancient and medieval utopias assumed scarcity and hierarchy but that this changed in the modern era as utopias came to stress the possibility of abundance and equality: "The decline in religious belief accompanying modernity has

... displaced the search for equality in the afterlife by an enhanced desire to achieve it in this life" (p.13). He does not, however, discuss how these changes in ideas about human potential relate to the material world in which the ideas emerge.

The treatment of Marx suffers for the same reasons. Claeys' approach results in a skewed perspective as it searches for Marx's ideas of what a socialist future would look like. There is an attempt to see Marx "as the greatest of all modern utopian writers" because he projected "the utopian scheme" of community of property to a large audience. It is argued that in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx (and Engels) proposed "a highly centralized system of economic administration in which credit, transportation and the method of production generally were to be managed by the state" (p.145). This is taking some proposals in the *Communist Manifesto* and using them to make conclusions about Marx's thought that are grossly distorted. In 1848 Marx and Engels envisaged state control of industry as a means of developing further the means of production to allow the possibility of communism – a proposal Marx did not think necessary later in his life as by that time the means of production had vastly expanded.

In fact, Marx was loath to lay down ideas of a future socialist society beyond its broad character of bringing class exploitation to an end (of which the end of money and the state would be consequences). His contribution to socialist thought was not to propose ideas of what socialism might look like but to further understanding of the social and economic processes that created its possibility and necessity.

Claeys' book is a wide-ranging primer on the history of utopian thought. For the socialist reader it highlights the still useful distinction made by Engels between utopian socialism and scientific socialism. The former seeks to implement an idealised plan of society which would spread by force of example. The latter seeks to develop an understanding of the underlying material forces operating in society, now and in the past. In so doing it aims to build a consciousness of class exploitation

and the need for a revolutionary transition to socialism based on working class social and political consciousness of this economic exploitation. The idea of socialism as a plan of an ideal society has little relevance to scientific socialism because the future society emerges from class conscious revolution moulded in the process of working class self-emancipation and not derived from a prior blueprint.

**Csk**

## Nowt to look forward to

**The Road to Wigan Pier Revisited, by Stephen Armstrong. Constable. £11.99.**



In 1936 George Orwell travelled to Wigan and wrote a classic account of the extent and effects of poverty. Now Stephen Armstrong has gone not just to Wigan but also to other towns in the north of England

to report his findings.

There are many similarities between the thirties and now: a recession, high unemployment and cuts in government spending, for instance. Above all, there is destitution, as many people are barely able to survive on what little they earn or the pittance they receive from the state. It is the personal accounts Armstrong provides that bring this home far more than any statistics could do.

One nineteen-year-old woman in Manchester was pregnant but she overslept and missed her first scan. As she had no proof she was pregnant, the Job Centre sanctioned her for being late for an interview: she was taken off Jobseeker's Allowance and had to make do with hardship payments of £28 a week. Job Centre staff are given a target of referring three people a week for sanctioning (their jobs supposedly consist of helping people into employment).

Another woman was made redundant, and now she cannot afford to heat her house in winter. She cuts Brillo pads in half before using them, has stopped buying butter since it went up 5p and uses her old clothes as cleaning cloths. One twelve-year-old sometimes eats only a bowl of cereal a day. He has

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never been outside Wigan. Another woman gets about £8 a day in benefits and is reduced to sleeping on her daughter's sofa. She says, "It's horrible, there's nowt to look forward to, there's nowt to fetch kids into this world. I've worked all my life and I've got nothing to show."

Most of the poor are not on benefits, however, but are employed. A particularly nasty development is zero-hour contracts, which do not actually guarantee paid work during slack periods. One man interviewed had a four-hour contract at Argos in Warrington, which made him ineligible for unemployment benefit. Things were OK when he worked 36 hours a week, but during a period of heavy snow there were few shoppers and most staff were sent home with four hours pay at minimum wage: £24.40. These and many others are part of the 'precariat' (a blend of *precarious* and *proletariat*).

As Armstrong says, 'the poor make a lot of people very, very rich'. If you pay for gas or electricity using a prepayment meter or cards, you pay a much higher rate than those who get a regular bill. Payday loan companies and doorstep lenders such as Provident Financial exploit this 'non-standard credit market' and do very nicely out of it (Provident made pre-tax profits of £62 million in the first six months of 2011). Rent-to-buy companies like BrightHouse sell TVs and other goods via weekly payments which can add up to well over twice the straightforward purchase price. They have vicious late-payment charges and are not above shouting to the whole street that you owe them money. A New York hedge fund has a majority stake in the company.

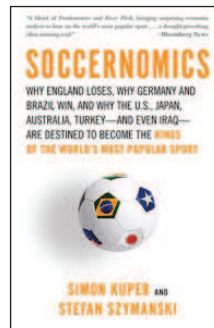
Unfortunately, Armstrong spends too much time criticising MPs for fiddling their expenses, and does not look into the real reasons for the poverty he depicts, class ownership

and the profit motive.

**PB**

## A Football Focus

**Soccernomics, by Simon Kuper and Stephan Szymanski. HarperSport. 2012. £8.99**



This is the expanded and updated version under a new title, and it proves a thought-provoking read. It looks at the economics of individual football clubs and the soccer industry as a whole and goes on to use statistical approaches to deconstruct and explain fan loyalty, racism in football, and why some clubs and countries appear to gain a competitive advantage over others.

One of the book's key findings is that, contrary to the assumptions of many, clubs that pay large transfer fees don't necessarily buy success. Indeed, in most cases they only succeed in racking up debts. (Arguably the one recent exception to this has been Manchester City.) Based on an analysis of Premier League and Championship clubs in England over ten years, the authors argue: "It seems that high wages help a club much more than do speculative transfers . . . [over time] the size of their wage bills explained a massive 92 per cent of variation in their league positions".

Also of interest is the chapter, 'The Curse of Poverty: Why Poor Countries are Poor at Sport'. The authors construct tables of countries' sporting prowess (not just in football, but in other major sports where there is a genuine global competition, and in athletics too). The key finding is that there is a close correlation between a country's sporting

performance and its position on the UN human development index, which measures life expectancy, literacy, education and living standards.

The authors also analyse the changing nature of modern football fandom and find that increasing numbers of supporters – especially those of the larger clubs – are shopping in the postmodern supermarket. They turn their attention to whether football fanaticism means suicide rates increase when teams get knocked out of major tournaments. The 'bread and circuses' argument of Marxists seems to gain some justification because their research demonstrates that perceptions of social cohesion within capitalism increase during major sporting tournaments, especially where the national team is participating, even leading to a noticeable fall in suicide rates. People's underlying condition or situation in society hasn't changed, but for a few brief weeks they feel less isolated from the human beings around them. But then, of course, the usual sense of alienation and ennui kicks in again.

One of the author's key arguments is that just as capitalism more generally relies on knowledge networks and 'social production', so do sports like football. Indeed, they contend that the greatest concentration of soccer clubs in advanced industrial capitalism is in Western Europe and it is here that the greatest advances in both fitness and tactics have been developed. This includes the notion – seen most clearly in the Champions League – that the best way to win games is 'fast passing' based on split-second touch football, rather than dribbling or the long-ball.

There is also a fascinating chapter on the nature of the European teams that win big tournaments, with many of them for a long period in Europe being from smaller provincial cities (Nottingham Forest, Borussia, Monchengladbach, etc). While the authors do seem to exaggerate to make a point on occasion, they go a long way to explain why clubs from large metropolitan areas and capital cities (which often tended to underperform in the past) are now increasingly dominating European competitions. And their predictive powers based on this analysis appear to be good – when this book came out they argued that Chelsea or Arsenal would soon be the first London club ever to win the Champions League. It must have happened before the ink was dry.

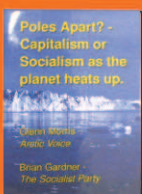
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## Hands off Wadiya!

*The Dictator*. Directed by Larry Charles



"Nationalism of one kind or another was the cause of most of the genocide of the twentieth century. Flags are bits of colored cloth that governments use first to shrink-wrap people's brains and then as ceremonial shrouds to bury the dead." Arundhati Roy

*The Dictator* (2012) stars Sacha Baron-Cohen as Admiral General Aladeen, dictator of the fictional country called the Republic of Wadiya. The story is loosely inspired by Charlie Chaplin's character Adenoid Hynkel, dictator of the fictional country called Tomainia in *The Great Dictator* (1940). Baron-Cohen's character is based on Colonel Gaddafi.

Sacha Baron-Cohen built his career on satirising superficial identity politics and testing the limits of tolerance of those identifying with groups who express offensive opinions. In an early appearance

he defended the right to be lazy against a rattled Tony Benn's fantasy of full employment.

Admiral General Aladeen is described as anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist. These are often the main claims made by real-world countries who find support from groups calling themselves socialist. Even in Britain, where most people do not get beyond the position of support for the country they are born in, some calling themselves 'socialists' get little further than 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.

The Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) has been known to use Marx and Lenin's support for national liberation movements (a position which Rosa Luxemburg demolished), as the basis of their opposition to wars waged by some countries but not others.

Trotskyist opponents of war, such as the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW), although more critical than Stalinists, are also selective, and support 'the lesser of two evils', depending on which countries are waging war. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) claims to come from the unorthodox Trotskyist tradition and does not automatically or uncritically defend all so-called anti-imperialist countries. Smaller groups such as the Alliance for Workers Liberty claim a 'Third-Camp' position and have had a supporter who has been known to fly both an Israeli and Palestinian flag on a demonstration. So all represent a nationalism of sorts, but a nationalism nonetheless. The delusion is that powerful states can be condemned as imperialist but less powerful states murdering workers can be (critically or otherwise) supported as anti-imperialist. When this is

couched in anti-interventionist terms, the socialist answer should be to intervene by promoting socialism everywhere, workers have no country.

At the end, even Aladeen's final speech manages to distinguish between real democracy and a situation where both states are milked for oil by local dictators or by states with more powerful militaries. For this reason it is unlikely to be reviewed widely on the British left.

Where Baron-Cohen's efforts to include romance and politics in his film fall flat, the more talented Chaplin succeeded in including both and was able to sum up his message of social freedom most eloquently - even better than most groups calling themselves socialist:

"You the people have the power, the power to create machines, the power to create happiness. You the people have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure. Then in the name of democracy let us use that power - let us all unite. Let us fight for a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power, but they lie. They do not fulfil their promise, they never will. Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people. Now let us fight to fulfil that promise. Let us fight to free the world, to do away with national barriers, do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness."

DJW



## Undercover under the covers

YOU'VE STARTED to notice the tell-tale signs that your partner might be having an affair - their emotional distance from you, their 'working late at the office' excuses, their ruffled appearance

when they finally return home. What do you do? Talk with them about your concerns? Question why we live in a society which makes people feel trapped in failing relationships? Or hire a camera crew to follow your partner and secretly film them cavorting with their lover, and then allow all this and the resulting messy confrontation to be broadcast worldwide? The last option seems to have been the most attractive to those appearing on *Cheaters* (UKTV Really, Sky 248, Freeview 20).

Slimy host Joey Greco guides us through each 'case'. One half of a couple talks about their suspicions that their partner is being unfaithful, accompanied by twinkly keyboard music for extra poignancy. Then we cut to what Greco's team of detectives has filmed: shaky undercover footage

of the partner's furtive meetings with their new lover. This is narrated with lines like "agents are on active duty waiting for movement from the target". The spurned spouse is shown this footage at the same time that their partner has been spied gallivanting elsewhere. Fired up with anger, they are then taken by Greco and his camera crew straight to where their partner is canoodling. If it looks like the ensuing confrontation won't be as violent as he's hoping for, Greco stokes the fire with a few smug comments.

The producers of this vile show try to justify themselves by saying "this program is both dedicated to the faithful and presented to the false-hearted to encourage their renewal of temperance and virtue". 'Virtue' isn't the most obvious word to associate with this show, especially as it

has been accused of staging some of its salacious set-ups. If anything, *Cheaters* would be less repellent if it was faked. At least then, its voyeuristic viewers would only be watching desperate actors rather than desperate people clinging on to whatever relationships they can find. *Cheaters* represents television sinking to a new low in presenting alienation as entertainment. Scrub your eyes clean after watching.

Mike Foster



## Party News continued

become the common heritage of all and so wealth could be produced and distributed without the need for money. We call it "world socialism". ZM call it a "resource-based economy".

In the first session, on what was wrong with the present economic system, both speakers agreed that it had a built-in tendency to uncontrolled "growth" which was having a detrimental effect on the environment. Dick Field, for the Party, explained this tendency as being due to the competitive struggle for profits between capitalist firms leading to the accumulation of more and more capital out of the profits they extracted from the workforce. Francesco, for ZM, argued that it was due to the need to pay interest to banks on money they had created, the money to pay which could only be found by borrowing more from the banks; so we were debt-slaves. Although ZM did not advocate monetary reform to mitigate this, he personally was in favour of it as a transitional measure towards a money-free society.

In the discussion Party members challenged the view that banks had the power to create money out of thin air.

In the second session, on how to get from here to there, Adam Buick, for the Party, said that a gradual evolution was not possible; there had to be a decisive and more or less rapid break with capitalism, to be brought about by the political action of the majority in society acting in their own interest. Steve Duffield, for ZM, said that ZM saw its role as to inform people of the situation, confident that they would see what the solution was. ZM was not a political party and did not advocate reformism or electoral action. People could begin to change things now by changing their lifestyle to rely less on money and

consumerism.

In the discussion, ZM members challenged the view that the new society could be voted in. Party members replied that what was important was to have a majority in favour and that it would be foolish to try to change society while leaving political power in the hands of the minority who benefited from capitalism. The vote was merely a tool to use to win political control.

## IMAGINE

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## Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

## Glasgow

Wednesday **15 August** 8.30pm

### THE CURSE OF RELIGION

Speaker: John Cumming

Community Central Halls, 304 Maryhill Road, Glasgow G20 7YE

## Central London

Wednesday **5 September**, 7.00pm

### BANKING REFORM OR ABOLITION OF CAPITALISM?

Debate between Positive Money (Ben Dyson) and the Socialist Party (Adam Buick).

Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

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## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess

but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order

that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



# 50 Years Ago

## Beeching's cuts

THE AXE man cometh.

This year's report from the British Transport Commission indicated where the proposed cuts in rail services are likely to fall.

The Newport to Brecon line, for instance, in South Wales. Here, said Transport Minister Marples, a statistical half-man is being carried for one hundred and seven miles by a 160 ton train — about equal to a five-ton crane lifting a bottle of beer.

"It would pay us," he said, "to give that man a car and close the line."

That is the yardstick which the Beeching inquiry has had to use. Not: Is it useful? but: Does it pay? Some of the Commission's undertakings can answer yes to this question. London Transport pays. British



For the chop: the Euston arch

R o a d  
S e r v i c e s  
and the  
docks have  
increased  
their receipts.

Only the  
r a i l w a y s

— and only  
some parts  
of them at  
that — fail

utterly to conform to capitalism's law of existence: Does it pay?

Mr. Marples is not alone in his recognition of this law. Labour Party spokesman George Strauss said, when the House of Commons were debating the Transport Commission's report, that the railway losses gave people the impression that what he called "publicly owned" transport was a failure.

Mr. Strauss has his definition of a failure, and of a success. The report showed, he said, that the reverse was true because all the services except the railways and the inland waterways had made a profit.

Both Tories and Labour are united in the opinion that to succeed nationalised industry must make a profit. Which means they agree that basically nationalised industries are as much a part of capitalism's economy as any private industry is.

One fact seems to have escaped notice. Removing the rail services from many parts of the country means that those areas are being left to depend upon road transport. This means that the government are virtually creating transport monopolies all over the country.

This is hardly consistent with the Conservative doctrine of what they like to call "healthy" competition. But really capitalism is impatient of all doctrine — except one.

Does it pay?

(from *The News in Review*, *Socialist Standard*, August 1962)

# ACTION REPLAY

## The beautiful game

MUCH WAS made of the political symbolism of the European Football Championships. Germany overwhelmed Greece and was then themselves taken apart by Italy (this is in football, not the eurozone economy). But Spain won, earning claims that they are the greatest team ever.

Back home in Spain, though, all is not well, with the recession hitting even harder than in Britain. Perhaps a quarter of the workforce is unemployed, while the figure rises to a scarcely-credible one-half of those under twenty-five.

Yet for one night, on 1 July after victory in the final, Spanish people were celebrating. 'We'll forget all the bad things that are happening. Even if



it's just for one day,' said a nurse who had just finished her first day's work in eleven months (BBC News website, 2 July).

Being on the dole gives you plenty of time to celebrate but, of course, less money to enjoy yourself. No doubt there were plenty of hangovers on the morning of 2 July, though there was no change in the unemployment situation. It would be silly to claim that it's just a matter of bread and circuses, that sporting success helps reconcile

workers to their  
downtrodden position.  
But it is certainly very  
handy for the rulers.

However many  
Spaniards do not need  
to worry about getting  
paid or scraping by

on benefits. There are a number of billionaires, but by far the richest person in the country is Amancio Ortega, owner of the chain of Zara clothes shops, and worth a cool \$37bn. Spain may have 'taken football to a new level' but some of the population occupy their very own level of wealth and exploitation.

PB

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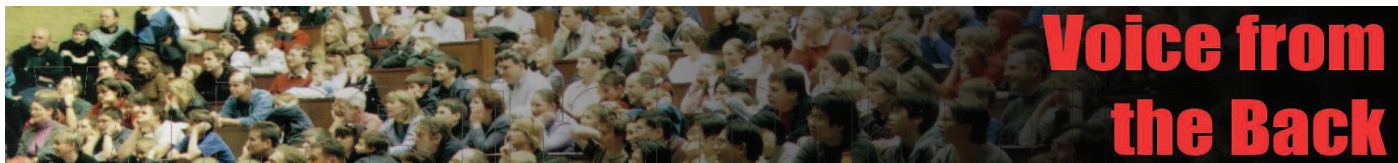
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# Voice from the Back

## The Control Of Ideas

The *New Yorker* magazine (7 June) asked a worthwhile question recently. 'Last week, Gallup announced the results of their latest survey on Americans and evolution. The numbers were a stark blow to high-school science teachers everywhere: forty-six per cent of adults said they believed that 'God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years.' Only fifteen per cent agreed with the statement that humans had evolved without the guidance of a divine power. .... Such poll data raises questions: Why are some scientific ideas hard to believe in? What makes the human mind so resistant to certain kinds of facts, even when these facts are buttressed by vast amounts of evidence?' We would suggest that one of the factors that stops the flow of scientific ideas to the minds of workers is the control that religious and political factions have over the education and communication facilities. The owning class in the USA spend billions of dollars ensuring that their workers don't understand the society they live in.

## The Realities Of War

We are all aware of the Hollywood depiction of wartime bravery and noble sacrifice in battle, but one aspect of war is never dealt with by the cinema. 'Suicides are surging among America's troops, averaging nearly one a day this year — the fastest pace in the nation's decade of war. The 154 suicides for active-duty troops in the first 155 days of the year far outdistance the U.S. forces killed in action in Afghanistan — about 50 per cent more — according to Pentagon

statistics obtained by The Associated Press' (*Associated Press*, 8 June). More suicides than those killed by the enemy! No wonder those portraying war as something admirable keep quiet about the suicide rate.

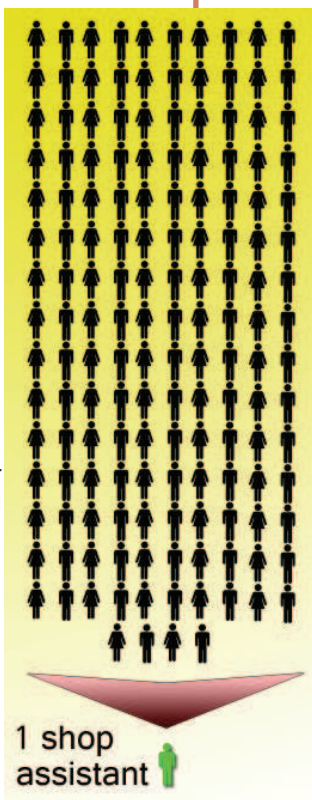
## Cruel sea, cruel system



Italy in an inflatable boat has described throwing overboard the bodies of fellow passengers who died during the voyage. Abbes Settou, from Eritrea, who was rescued by Tunisian fishermen, said the migrants, including three members of his family, and ten women, slowly died of hunger, thirst and exhaustion' (*Times*, 12 July). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) some 170 migrants have died attempting the Mediterranean crossing this year. Capitalism's hellish conditions force workers into unbearable situations.

## Spend, Spend, Spend

All over the world capitalism is experiencing an economic recession. Even formerly booming Japan is feeling the pinch with markets in free-fall. Amidst this period of uncertainty and fear there is of course one section of the population that continues to spend, spend, spend as usual. 'An apartment that is believed to be the most expensive one-bedroom property in the world is on sale in Tokyo with a price tag of a cool Y1.8 billion (£14.72 million). .... The price means that 1 square foot of the property costs £3,320.33. The owner of the penthouse apartment — whom Sotheby's would only identify as a successful and married businessman — spent 18 months completely refurbishing the property from a four-bedroom family home' (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 July). The owning class continue to indulge themselves no matter the economic world climate.



## Hard Work

One of the myths espoused by supporters of capitalism is that the present economic downturn is caused by the laziness of the working class. Far from this being the case thousands of workers are desperate for a job as can be seen by the following statistics. 'Leading companies are being flooded by 73 applications for each graduate vacancy, a major report reveals today. That figure is an average and the number is even higher in some sectors, with 154 chasing each post in retail and 142 vying for a single job in investment banking. The report says that it is even harder to find work this year as openings are down on 2011 amid the economic uncertainty worsened by the eurozone crisis' (*Daily Mail*, 4 July).

## Desperate Workers

In their desperate struggle to survive, many workers from Africa try to get to Europe by any means possible. 'The only survivor of 54 Africans who tried to cross to



## FREE LUNCH

